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ABSTRACT

A group of 195 students enrolled in various communications courses at General Motors Institute filled out course evaluation forms which were then factor analyzed. Items involving an evaluation of teachers accounted for 69% of the variation. Items about course objectives, amount of work in relation to credit, textbooks, tests, and assignments were much less important in the evaluations. The most important aspects of teachers' communication behavior were those that encouraged trust, respect, friendship, and warmth in the relationships with their classes. Content aspects of the teachers' communication received less emphasis in the evaluations. (TJ)

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A FACTOR ANALYSIS OF TEACHER EVALUATIONS IN COMMUNICATION COURSES

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BACKGROUND

In an earlier paper (Tubbs, 1974) I described some ways in which the content and relationship aspects of communication (Watzlawick, et al., 1967) could be applied to communication between teacher and student in the classroom. Content refers to the information conveyed in any message, while relationship refers to the information about the information. Watzlowih, et al. state ". . . all such relationship statements are about one or several of the following assertions: 'This is how I see myself . . . this is how I see you . . . this is how I see you seeing me and so forth in theoretically infinite regress.'"(p. 54)

In the teaching context the analogy may be drawn between the task-oriented behavior of the instructor as the content, and his/her warmth, empathy, fairness, etc., as contributing to the relationship aspect of communication. This subject has been of interest for some time. Tiedman (1942) emphasized the importance of the student-teacher relationship when he stated that "Teachers that are aloof, unfriendly, and otherwise irritate and antagonize their pupils destroy interest and incentives for learning and promote resentment, unwholesomeness [sic] attitudes, and personality disorders." Gibb (1960) supports this notion by indicating that a classroom climate which is free of fear maximizes learning. Fausti and Moore (1966) have also argued for the importance of effective interpersonal relations between students and teachers.

Munn and Giffin (1973) studied the relative impact of teacher task and maintenance behaviors (roughly analogous to content and relationship behaviors) in the classroom. Initiating structure was the task-oriented behavior and was defined as ". . . a teacher's attempts to develop patterns of organization, channels of communication, and ways of getting the job done. Initiating structure includes behavior that gives and seeks information, clarifies, coordinates, and summarizes the thinking of the group." Maintenance behavior or consideration was defined as ". . . the behavior of the teacher which encourages mutual trust, respect, friendship, and warmth in the relationship between the teacher and the group members." (p. 305) They found that student learning was not differentially affected by teachers who were high or low on one or both of these dimensions. Student satisfaction, however, was differentially affected. The highest ratings for student satisfaction were awarded to the teachers who were high on both initiating behaviors and consideration. The authors conclude that teacher effectiveness must be evaluated both by student cognitive achievement as well as student satisfaction with the teacher and the course.

Other research on teacher style indicates (Flanders, 1960) a so-called direct influence style (defined as lecturing, giving directions, and criticizing) is less effective than the indirect influence style (defined as accepting feelings, praising or encouraging, accepting or using student ideas, and asking questions). The indirect influence style would seem to place a relatively greater emphasis on the relationship aspects of classroom communication. Miller and Hylton (1974), however failed to find any direct relationship between the number of

high school student failures and the direct or indirect style of the teacher.

As a result of the somewhat disparate results regarding teacher style and teacher effectiveness, a study was conducted to determine the various components which comprise teacher communication behavior.

Method

One hundred and ninety-five students at General Motors Institute comprised the sample. Students were enrolled in various communication classes taught by fifteen different professors. Classes from freshman through senior were included.

All subjects were asked to complete a twenty-seven item questionnaire at the end of the course evaluating the professor and the course. The questionnaire was a modified form of the teacher evaluation form developed and published by McKeachie (1969). A copy appears in the appendix of this paper.

The statistical treatment employed was a factor analysis of the intercorrelations contained in a 27 x 27 correlation matrix. The Hotelling principle axes method with orthogonal varimax rotation was used, using a stop criterion suggested by Harman (1960). Only factors with an eigenvalue of 1.00 or greater was selected for rotation.

Results

Five factors accounted for a combined sixty-four percent of the total variance. Of the explained variance, factor I accounted for 69 percent, and each of the other four factors accounted for about eight percent.

Factor I Teacher Evaluation. Factor I accounted for 69 percent of the explained variance and was comprised of twelve items. All items

for all factors, and their factor loadings appear in Table I. Items loading highest on factor I were (in descending order of importance): (1) Does he listen to students; (2) Does he appear sensitive to students' feelings and problems; (3) Does he make students feel free to ask questions, disagree, express their ideas, etc.; (4) Does he respect students; (5) Is he actively helpful when students have difficulty; (6) Is he flexible; (7) Is he fair and impartial in his dealings with students; (8) Considering everything, how would you rate this teacher; (9) Is he interested in his subject; (10) Are the grades assigned fairly; (11) Does he stimulate thinking; and (12) Does he present his material in an interesting way?

Factor II Course Evaluation. Factor II accounted for about eight percent of the explained variance and was comprised of five items (in descending order of importance: (1) How would you rate the contribution of the textbook to the course; (2) Considering everything, how would you rate this course; (3) Is the amount of work required appropriate for the credit received; (4) Are the tests fair; and (5) Are the objectives of the course clear?

Factor III Assignments and Feedback. Factor III accounted for about eight percent of the explained variance and was comprised of four items all of which correlated negatively with high teacher evaluations. These results suggest that courses with a high number of writing and speaking assignments tend to arouse student hackles since two skill development courses in written and oral communication accounted for most of this student reaction. The items in descending order of importance were: (1) Are the speaking assignments worthwhile; (2) Does he give students feedback on their performance; (3) Does he tell

students when they have done particularly well; (4) Are the writing assignments worthwhile?

Discussion

Although the results of the factor analysis do not answer as many questions as we might like, they do provide some interesting food for thought. First, the evaluation is overwhelmingly determined by the rating of the teachers' behaviors and only less by other items such as the course objectives, amount of work in relation to credit, textbooks, the tests, and the type and worth of assignments.

Second, in terms of teacher behaviors, the seven items loading the highest all had to do with the relationship or maintenance or consideration aspects of communication.

The next highest item is a composite which reflects both content and relationship aspects ("Considering everything, how would you rate this teacher?"). The four items loading the lowest on factor I relate more to the content than the relationship aspects of teachers' behavior ("Is he interested in the subject, are the grades assigned fairly, does he stimulate thinking, does he present material in an interesting way?"). From these findings we could tentatively conclude that the relationship aspects of teacher behavior are more important in determining his/her evaluation than are the content aspects.

Finally, it is notable that both content and relationship aspects are contained in factor I; also that factor I accounts for 69 percent of the total variance, while the other factors combined account for only 31 percent. This would tend to support Munn and Giffin's finding that the effective teachers are those who are able to master both content and relationship aspects of classroom communication. We

are currently engaged in further research on this topic to provide still more answers.

TABLE I

FACTOR ITEM LOADINGS

Factor	Item	Loading
1	7	0.78880
1	2	0.76990
1	4	0.71680
1	8	0.69952
1	1	0.68664
1	3	0.64645
1	5	0.63231
1	17	0.60659
1	11	0.51413
1	25	0.50337
1	15	0.48631
1	16	0.45395
2	26	0.70798
2	27	0.70450
2	20	0.62269
2	22	0.59656
2	19	0.52932
3	24	-0.72518
3	18	-0.68413
3	9	-0.65414
3	23	-0.55251
4	21	0.86872
5	6	-0.64599
5	12	-0.64220
5	14	-0.56964
5	13	-0.56503
5	10	-0.53217

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